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A VISIT TO ROCKALL.

ASK any decently informed person which is the most westerly of the British Islands, and it is ten to one that the first answer you get will be 'St Kilda.' Possibly your shake of the head will elicit—if your friend be a thoughtful person, with some knowledge of Ireland—the admission that it may be Achill or the Blaskets; and if you permit him a glance at the atlas, he will shut it up again with a bang and exclaim: 'I told you so—the Blaskets.' But do not give him time to register a private resolve to catch his less observant friends out in their geography with this answer to the question. Reopen the atlas, and take his hand and gently but firmly guide his finger to latitude 57° N. and longitude 14° W., and then chuckle softly to yourself as the map reveals to his astonished gaze the little red-coloured speck of Rockall.

Yes, unnoticed as it is in the school geographies, this lonely rock—more than one hundred and eighty miles west of St Kilda, and two hundred and ninety miles from the nearest point of the Scottish mainland—has a right to call itself a British Isle. For it is separated by an ocean a thousand fathoms deep from all other lands or island groups except the British, and stands, in fact, upon the edge of what we may call the British plateau, a solitary outpost left at the front, last relic and mute witness of the western coast of that retreating continent out of which the Atlantic waves have carved our Islands. But Trinity House sets no light upon its cliffs, and the Post-office ignores it; for it is uninhabited. Small wonder, then, that in this business age it is overlooked; small wonder even if it disappears altogether from the cheap atlas and primer of geography, even as it is doomed at no distant date to disappear actually beneath the waste of waters.

Yet there are plenty of people to whom the existence of Rockall is still a fact of practical interest. Ask the Shetland fisherman who sometimes in the summer lies for weeks in his stout-

built, well-found, but malodorous yawl, fishing in the neighbourhood of its rocky reefs and ledges. Ask the skipper of the outward-bound Baltic trader going north about, whom in foggy weather the clamour of its sea-fowl has warned, only just in time, of his proximity to its granite mass. Ask the weather-beaten master of the Dundee whaler who, caught in his return voyage by the equinoctial gales, has strained his eyes into the gloom and driving mist all night, fearful, while he steams vainly against the hurricane, of suddenly spying the gleam of its breakers. Ask the dark wiry little Breton sailor, whose tiny schooner, running before wind and waves with bare poles on the way home from the deep-sea fishing on the Iceland banks, has lurched helplessly past those thundering cliffs, only saved by the eddy of the wind recoiling from them. No one of these toilers of the deep forgets the existence of Rockall, or counts it too insignificant for its whereabouts to be carefully noted.

But should your curiosity be excited, as mine was long ago, to learn the features of the isle from those who have seen it, you will find it no easy task. They are scattered folk, and hard to come across; and harder still is it, when you have chanced upon one of them, to draw forth from him anything like a description of its appearance. To indicate with a dab of a tarry thumb its position on the chart seems description enough to a mariner. By dint of tedious cross-questioning I did once gather from a Shetlander that it was 'a peerie bit rock wi' shoal water to west'ard;' and from a more imaginative Swede, that it was 'yust like a ship;' but anything more satisfying to the sentimental interest I always felt in this lone outlier of our shores I could not for many a year obtain. Last summer, however, I induced a friend, whom I met at Oban, and who begged me to come for a cruise in his yacht, to extend the voyage to Rockall.

The morning of our third day out from Stornoway—where we laid in provisions—was hazy, and the sea as calm as glass. By the patent log and the course we had run, my friend M— reckoned

that we must be pretty close to our destination. Nothing, however, broke our limited horizon; so, with directions to the mate to keep her on her course and sing out if he sighted anything, we went below to breakfast; nor did we allow our meal to be interrupted by the mate's announcement through the skylight of, 'A sail on the port bow.' When we came on deck, however, M— turned his glasses on the 'sail,' which the mate now pointed out abeam. 'By Jove!' he cried presently, 'that's the rummiest rig I've seen for many a long day;' and, as I took the glasses from him, he added: 'She must be a brig that has just bent on new royals or top-gall'ns's, or perhaps is busy bending them on now. Her lower sails are black, and whatever she is putting aloft is as white as snow. I suppose she is lying becalmed.'

I was just turning away, satisfied with M—'s explanation, and not much interested, when the man at the wheel, after ejecting his quid, and slowly drawing his sleeve across his mouth, hoarsely remarked: 'Beg pardon, sir; that's no vessel, that's a rock.'

In another glance we instantly recognised our error. The mysterious brig was the island we were in quest of! The yacht's head was at once laid direct for it by the somewhat crestfallen mate, and we busied ourselves with conjecture as to the possibility of the island possessing so lofty a peak as to be covered with perpetual snow. Rapidly nearing it, however, we soon made it out to be not more than a hundred feet high—as a matter of fact it is only seventy feet—and the snow hypothesis had to give way to the more obvious explanation that the white was due to the droppings of the countless sea-birds which make the rock their home. About a quarter of a mile off, as we approached it from the north-west, a cast or two of the lead showed rapidly shoaling water; so the yacht's engines were stopped and her head swung round. The gig was quickly manned, and in a few minutes we were in the cool shadow cast by the cliff. Finding this side precipitous, we rowed slowly round by the east, half-deafened the while by the screams of the myriads of startled sea-fowl, till we came to the southern side, and there found a place where it was just possible, thanks to the fortunately calm state of the sea, to scramble from the boat on to the rocks, and thence up a small rift to the summit. Here we found ourselves on a scanty plateau, the greater part of which was taken up by the whitened hummock or peak which we had thought to be the topsails of a brig. No need for any botanist to make a pilgrimage hither! Not a scrap of vegetation could we discern in any part of this strange remnant of a vanished land. But what a paradise for the egg-collector in May! Fragments and chips of egg-shells abounded, some of them easily distinguishable as belonging to rare specimens.

While M— was busy taking an observation—the results of which, not tallying with the chart, gave him several hours' subsequent occupation in finding out his errors—and endeavouring to ascertain the extent of the island's surface by rough measurements with a rope, I occupied myself in identifying as far as I could the numerous varieties of sea-birds whose haunt we had invaded, and which kept up an indescribable din on every side. Kittiwakes predominated; and I soon perceived that the eastern face of the rock was the special preserve of their noisy colony. Terns, herring-gulls, and lesser black-backs formed most of the rest of the hovering crowd; while puffins, razor-bills, guillemots, and occasionally a little auk, darted seaward from their clefts and crannies and plumped into the water. Presently I made out some tiny petrels, owners, no doubt, of some of the holes abounding in the two feet or more of guano on which I stood; and then a bird which I took to be a shearwater, and now an extra flutter among the terns, directed my gaze to the dark form of a skua high aloft; perhaps one of the Great Skuas whose last breeding haunt in Foula I know but would not for untold gold reveal. At length the sight of a fulmar petrel, a specimen of which I greatly desired, determined me to send the sailors off to the yacht for my gun, forgotten in the hurry of our departure for the rock.

M—, who had completed his observations, and was now pouring a libation of Scotch whisky over a small cairn—which it had cost him and the men much labour to construct out of the few loose bits of granite available—decided to accompany them, declaring that he had enough of the heat and stench of the place, and would like to have a bath and be comfortable. So I sat down in the shadow of a rock by the water's edge, after shoving them off, and, lighting a pipe, fell to lazy speculation on the past history of this queer islet. Perhaps, I thought, when the volcano of Mull was rearing its cone of scorice and lava ten thousand feet into the frosty air, and the glaciers of Norway were grinding Caithness into shape, Rockall was a tall mountain bearing its ice-cap, and lording it over rugged dales where the western-wandering reindeer trooped amid the sparse junipers and birches and stunted firs, and browsed on the abundant mosses. Perhaps—who knows?—Tertiary man dwelt in its caves, and hunted the seal in its already sea-harassed fringe. And then, ages after the Continent retreated before the resistless ocean surge, it must have been an island, large at first, but ever dwindling, slowly dwindling, and watching its smaller brethren swallowed up one by one till it was left alone. Surely, in these later times, before it crumbled to a single peak, it had inhabitants, rude fisher folk, like those of St Kilda. What was their race? When did the last of them perish? Has

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even no tradition of them survived into historic times?

Musing thus in the drowsy heat of noon, I presently fell into a doze, from which a splash of cold brine on my face awakened me. A gentle swell was beginning to sweep past my resting-place and to break against the rocks. Hastily rising, I became aware that a startling change had taken place. Sun, sky, horizon, yacht, all were blotted out from my view by a dense white veil of fog. I looked at my watch and found it was past one. But the boat had not returned! No; nor was it likely that the boat would even attempt to find the island till the fog lifted. Meanwhile, the current, which I now noticed setting strongly past my feet, was drifting my friends away. Here was a pretty go! I began to think I had had enough of Rockall, though it was not for some time that the full danger of my position dawned upon me. These summer fogs often last for days together; and should stormy weather come on before the yacht had an opportunity of finding me, my chance of getting off was small. I climbed up to the little peak, hoping to catch sight of the *Norah's* topmasts above the bank of mist; but it was in vain. Then I restlessly perambulated the whole of my little domain, barely fifty feet square, disturbing, perhaps, fresh varieties of sea-birds, but not caring to notice them; then I sat down upon the cairn and tried to smoke.

Hour after hour passed, and my anxiety grew. Late in the afternoon my hopes were raised by the sound of the *Norah's* steam siren, only to be dashed again as the melancholy hoots grew fainter and fainter and died away. Then night came on. I crept into the rift on the south side and shivered there till daybreak. I dare not say I slept. Mysterious noises, probably made by seals, and uncanny chucklings and sibilations, which I tried to put down to the birds, kept my nerves ajar. Had I possessed more imagination I suppose ghosts of wrecked mariners, phantom vikings or buccaneers, or corpses from galleons of the Armada or Dutch East Indiamen, would have crawled and flitted about the rocks and harrowed my susceptible soul. But the physical pain of hunger, cramp, and cold was enough for me.

The gray dawn at length came, and to my joy, brought with it a breeze which quickly dispelled the fog. How eagerly I stood up on the cairn and waved my cap and shouted as I saw the *Norah* emerge from the fog-bank and point her head towards me! How quickly all the oppressive sense of utter loneliness and abandonment melted away, and left me laughing at the fears which seemed so real a few minutes ago! With what confidence in the presence of my fellow-beings I threw myself into the water and swam out, cold and stiff as I was, when the boat on arriving, with M—— in it, more anxious and fagged than myself, could not, for the increased swell, venture alongside! And what a breakfast I ate!

No; I did not return to shoot that fulmar petrel. Stormy weather came on; and with a last look at the lonely rock that might easily have been my grave, already, as we looked, beginning to be enveloped in the spray of the

rising waves, we were glad to run before the gale to the shelter of Lough Swilly. But it will be long before I forget my visit to the most westerly and most solitary of British Isles.

THE IVORY GATE.*

By WALTER BESANT.

CHAPTER VIII.—IN HONOUR OF THE EVENT.

MAY one dwell upon so simple a thing as a small family dinner-party? It is generally undramatic and uneventful: it is not generally marked even by a new dish or a bottle of rare wine. Yet there lingers in the mind of every man the recollection of pleasant dinners. I should like to write a Book of Dinners, not a book for the *gourmet*, but a book of memories. It might be a most delightful volume. There would be in it the schoolboys' dinner. I remember a certain dinner at eighteenth-century a head, at Richmond, before we had the row in the boat, when we quarrelled and broke the oars over each other's heads, and very nearly capsized: a certain undergraduates' dinner, in which four men—three of whom are now ghosts—joined: the Ramblers' dinner, of lamb chops and bottled ale and mirth and merriment: the two-by-two dinner in the private room, a dainty dinner of sweet lamb, sweet bread, sweet peas, sweet looks, sweet Moselle, and sweet words. Is it really true that one never—never—gets young again? Some people do, I am sure, but they are under promise to say nothing about it. I shall—and then that dinner may perhaps—one cannot say—one never knows—and I suppose—if one was young again—that they would be found just as pretty as they ever were. There is the official dinner, stately and cold: the city dinner, which generally comes to a man when his digestion is no longer what it was: the family dinner, in which the intellect plays so small a part, because no one wastes his fine things on his brothers and sisters: the dinner at which one has to make a speech. Indeed, this Book of Dinners promises to be a most charming volume. I should attempt it, however, with trembling, because, to do it really well, one should be, first of all, a scholar, if only to appreciate things said and spoken, and in order to connect the illustrious past with food and drink. Next, he ought to be still young: he certainly must have a proper feeling for wine, and must certainly understand when and why one should be grateful to good Master Cook: he should be a past or present master in the Art of Love and a squire of Dames: he should be good at conversation: he must, in the old language, be a worshipper of Bacchus, Venus, Phœbus Apollo, the Muses nine and the Graces three. He must be no poor weakling, unable to enjoy the good creatures of flesh, fowl, fish, and wine: no boor: and no log insensible to loveliness.

Dinner, which should be a science, has long been treated as one of the Fine Arts. Now every Fine Art, as we all know, has its fashions and its caprices. Those who are old enough to remember the dinners of twenty, thirty, or forty years ago can remember many of their fashions

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and caprices. In the Thirties, for instance, everything was carved upon the table. It required a strong man to give a dinner-party. Fortunately, a dinner then consisted of few dishes. They drank sherry with dinner and port afterwards. The champagne, if there was any, was sweet. The guests were bidden for half-past six; they sat down to dinner before seven. At eight the ladies went up-stairs: at half-past ten the men joined them. Their faces were flushed, their shoulders were inclined to lurch, and their speech was the least bit thick. Wonderful to relate, brandy-and-water used to be served to these toppers in the drawing-room itself.

Mr Dering had altered little in his dinner customs. They mostly belonged to the Sixties, with a survival of some belonging to the Thirties. Things were carved upon the sideboard: this was in deference to modern custom: champagne formed an integral part of the meal: but the dinner itself was solid: the cloth after dinner was removed, leaving the dark polished mahogany after the old fashion: the furniture of the room was also in the old style: the chairs were heavy and solid: the walls were hung with a dark crimson paper of velvety texture: the curtains and the carpets were red: there were pictures of game and fruit: the sideboard was as solid as the table.

Checkley the clerk, who was invited as a faithful servant of the house, to the celebration of the new partnership, was the first to arrive. Dressed in a hired suit, he looked like an undertaker's assistant: the gloom upon his face heightened the resemblance. Why the partnership caused this appearance of gloom, I know not. Certainly, he could never expect to be made a partner himself. It was perhaps a species of jealousy which filled his soul. He would no longer know so much of the business.

George came with the Mother-in-law Elect and the *fiancée*. Forgiveness, Peace, Amnesty, and Charity sat all together upon the brow of the elder lady. She was magnificent in a dark crimson velvet, and she had a good deal of gold about her arms and neck. Jewish ladies are said to show, by the magnificence of their attire, the prosperity of the business. Why not? It is a form of enjoying success. There are many forms: one man buys books: let him buy books: another collects pictures. Why not? One woman wears crimson velvet. Why not? In this way she enjoys her wealth and proclaims it. Again, why not? It seems to the philosopher a fond and vain thing to deck the person at all times, and especially fond when the person is middle-aged and no longer beautiful. We are not all philosophers. There are many middle-aged men who are extremely happy to put on their uniform and their medals and their glittering helmets. Mrs Arundel wore her velvet as if she enjoyed the colour of it, the richness of it, the light and shade that lay in its folds and the soft feel of it. She wore it, too, as an outward sign that this was a great occasion. Her daughter, Lady Dering, came also arrayed in a queenly dress of amber silk with an aigrette of feathers in her hair. To be sure, she was going on somewhere after the dinner. Elsie, for her part, came in a creamy white almost like a bride: but she looked much happier than most brides.

Hilda's husband, Sir Samuel, who was some six or seven years younger than his brother, was in appearance a typical man of wealth. The rich man can no longer, as in the days of good old Sir Thomas Gresham, illustrate his riches by costly furs, embroidered doublets, and heavy chains. He has to wear broadcloth and black. Yet there is an air, a carriage, which belongs to the rich man. In appearance, Sir Samuel was tall, like his brother, but not thin like him: he was corpulent: his face was red: he was bald, and he wore large whiskers, dyed black. The late dissensions were completely forgotten. Hilda embraced her sister fondly. 'My dear,' she whispered, 'we have heard all. Everything—everything is changed by these fortunate events. They do you the greatest credit.—George'—she took his hand and held it tenderly—'I cannot tell you how happy this news has made us all. You will be rich in the course of years. Sir Samuel was only saying, as we came along'—

'I was saying, young gentleman,' the Knight interrupted, 'that the most beautiful thing about money is the way it develops character. We do not ask for many virtues—only honesty and diligence—from the poor. When a man acquires wealth we look for his better qualities.'

'Yes, indeed,' Hilda murmured. 'His better qualities begin to show.—Elsie, dear, that is a very pretty frock. I don't think I have seen it before. How do you like my dress?'

George accepted this sudden turn in opinion with smiles. He laughed at it afterwards. For the moment it made him feel almost as if he was being rewarded for some virtuous action.

Dinner was announced at seven—such were the old-fashioned manners of this old gentleman. He led in Mrs Arundel, and placed Elsie on his left. At first, the dinner promised to be a silent feast. The two lovers were not disposed to talk much—they had not yet recovered from the overwhelming and astonishing events of the day. Sir Samuel never talked at the beginning of dinner—besides, there was turtle soup and red mullet and whitebait—it is sinful to divert your attention from these good creatures. His wife never talked at dinner or at any other time more than she could help. Your statuesque beauty seldom does. Talking much involves smiling and even laughing, which distorts the face. A woman must encourage men to talk: this she can do without saying much herself.

Presently Mr Dering roused himself and began to talk, with a visible effort, first to Mrs Arundel of things casual: then to Elsie: and then to his brother, but always with an effort, as if he was thinking of other things. And a constraint fell upon the party.

When the cloth was removed and the wine and fruit were placed upon the dark and lustrous board, he filled a glass and made a kind little speech.

'My Partner,' he said, 'I drink to you. May your connection with the House be prosperous! It is a very great good fortune for me to have found such a partner.—Elsie, I join you with my Partner. I wish you both every happiness.'

He drained the bumper and sent round the decanters.

Then he began to talk, and his discourse was most strange. 'Had it been,' said his brother afterwards, 'the idle fancies of some crack-brained writing fellow, I could have understood it; but from him—from a steady old solicitor—a man who has never countenanced any kind of nonsense—to be sure he said it was only an illusion. I hope it isn't a softening. Who ever heard of such a man as that having dreams and illusions?'

Certainly no one had ever before heard Mr Dering talk in this new manner. As a rule, he was silent and grave even at the head of his own table. He spoke little and then gravely. To-night his talk as well as his face was changed. Who would have thought that Mr Dering should confess to illusions, and should relate dreams, and should be visited by such dreams? Remember that the speaker was seventy-five years of age, and that he had never before been known so much as to speak of benevolence. Then you will understand something of the bewilderment which fell upon the whole company.

He began by raising his head and smiling with a strange and new benignity—but Elsie thought of her portrait. 'We are all one family here,' he said; 'and I may talk. I want to tell you of a very remarkable thing that has recently happened to me. It has been growing, I now perceive, for some years. But it now holds me strongly, and it is one reason why I am anxious to have the affairs of the House in the hands of a younger man. For it may be a sign of the end. At seventy-five anything uncommon may be a sign.'

'You look well, Mr Dering, and as strong as most men of sixty,' said Mrs Arundel.

'Perhaps. I feel well and strong. The fact is that I am troubled—or pleased—or possessed—by an Illusion.'

'You with an Illusion?' said his brother.

'I myself. An Illusion possesses me. It whispers me from time to time that my life is wholly spent in promoting the happiness of other people.'

'Well,' said his brother, 'since you are a first-class solicitor, and manage the affairs of many people very much to their advantage, you certainly do promote their happiness.'

'Yes, yes—I suppose so. My Illusion further is that it is done outside my business—without any bill afterwards'—Checkley looked up with eyes wide open—'I am made to believe that I am working and living for the good of others. A curious Illusion, is it not?'

The City man shook his head. 'That any man can possibly live for the good of others is, I take it, always and under all circumstances an Illusion. In the present state of society—and a very admirable state it is'—he rolled his bald head as he spoke and his voice had a rich roll in it—'a man's first duty—his second duty—his third duty—his hundredth duty—is to himself. In the City it is his business to amass wealth—to roll it up—roll it up'—he expressed the words with feeling—to invest it profitably—to watch it, and to nurse it as it fructifies—fructifies. Afterwards, when he is rich enough, if ever a man can be rich enough, he may exercise as much charity as he pleases—as he pleases. Charity seems to please some people as a glass of fine

wine'—he illustrated the comparison—'pleases the palate—pleases the palate.'

The lawyer listened politely and inclined his head.

'There is at least some method in my Illusion,' he went on. 'You mentioned it. The solicitor is always occupied with the conduct of other people's affairs. That must be admitted. He is always engaged in considering how best to guide his fellow-man through the labyrinthine world. He receives his fellow-man at his entrance into the world, as a ward: he receives him grown up, as a client; he advises him all his life at every step and in every emergency. If the client goes into partnership, or marries, or buys a house, or builds one, or gets into trouble, the solicitor assists and advises him. When the client grows old, the solicitor makes his will. When the client dies, the solicitor becomes his executor and his trustee, and administers his estate for him. It is thus a life, as I said, entirely spent for other people. I know not of any other, unless it be of medicine, that so much can be said. And think what terrors, what anxieties, what disappointments, the solicitor witnesses and alleviates! Think of the family scandals he hushes up and keeps secret! Good Heavens! if a solicitor in large practice were to tell what he knows, think of the terrible disclosures! He knows everything. He knows more than a Roman Catholic priest, because his penitents not only reveal their own sins but also those of their wives and sons and friends and partners. And anxiety, I may tell you, makes a man better at confessing than penitence. Sometimes we bring actions at law and issue writs and so forth. Well now: this part of our business, which is disagreeable to us, is actually the most beneficent of any. Because, by means of the cases brought before the High Court of Justice, we remind the world that it must be law abiding as well as law worthy. The Law, in order to win respect, must first win fear. Force comes before order. The memory of force must be kept up. The presence of force must be felt. For instance, I have a libel case just begun. It is rather a bad libel. My libeller will suffer: he will bleed: but he will bleed for the public good, because thousands who are only anxious to libel and slander, to calumniate and defame their neighbours, will be deterred. Oh! it will be a most beneficent case—far-reaching—striking terror into the hearts of ill-doers.—Well—this, my friends, is my Illusion. It is, I suppose, one of the many Illusions with which we cheat old age and rob it of its terrors. To anybody else I am a hard-fisted lawyer, exacting his pound of flesh from the unfortunate debtor, and making myself rich at the expense of the creditor.'

'Nonsense about how a man gets rich,' said the man of business. 'He can only get rich if he is capable. Quite right. Let the weak go under. Let the careless and the lazy starve.'

'At the same time,' said Elsie softly, 'it is not all illusion. There are others besides the careless and the lazy'—

'Sometimes,' the old lawyer went on, 'this Illusion of mine—oh! I know it is only Illusion—takes the form of a dream—so vivid that it comes back to me afterwards as a reality. In this dream, which is always the same, I seem

to have been engaged in some great scheme of practical benevolence.'

'Practical—What? You engaged in Practical Benevolence?' the City man asked in profound astonishment. The Illusion was astonishing enough; but to have his brother talk of practical benevolence was amazing indeed.

'Practical benevolence,' repeated Mr Dering. His voice dropped. His eyes looked out into space: he seemed as one who narrates a story.

'It is a curiously persistent dream. It comes at irregular intervals; it pleases me while it lasts.—Oh! in the evening after dinner, while one takes a nap in the easy-chair, perhaps—it is, as I said, quite vivid. The action of this dream always takes place in the same room—a large room, plainly furnished, and looking out upon an open space—I should know it if I saw it—and it fills me with pleasure—in my dream—just to feel that I am—there is no other word for it—diffusing happiness. How I manage this diffusion, I can never remember; but there it is—good solid happiness, such as, in waking moments, one feels to be impossible.'

'Diffusing happiness—you!' said his brother.

'A very beautiful dream,' said Elsie. But no one dared to look in each other's face.

'This strange dream of mine,' continued Mr Dering, 'does not form part of that little Illusion, though it seems connected with it. And as I said, mostly it comes in the evening. The other day, however, I had it in the afternoon—went to sleep in my office, I suppose.—Did you find me asleep, Checkley? It was on Friday.'

'No. On Friday afternoon you went out.'

'Ah! When I came back, then—I had forgotten that I went out. Did I go out? Strange! Never mind. This continuous dream opens up a world of new ideas and things which are, I perceive, when I am awake, quite unreal and illusory. Yet they please. I see myself, as I said, diffusing happiness with open hands. The world which is thus made happier consists entirely of poor people. I move among them unseen: I listen to them: I see what they do, and I hear what they say. Mind—all this is as real and true to me as if it actually happened. And it fills me with admiration of the blessed state of poverty. In my dream I pity the rich, with all my heart. To get rich, I think—in this dream—they must have practised so many deceptions'—

'Brother! brother!' Sir Samuel held up both hands.

'In my dream—only in my dream. Those who inherit riches are burdened with the weight of their wealth, which will not suffer them to enter into the arena; will not allow them to develop and to exercise their talents, and afflicts them with the mental and bodily diseases that belong to indolence. The poor, on the other hand, who live from day to day, sometimes out of work for weeks together, practise easily the simple virtues of brotherly love, charity, and mutual helpfulness. They have learned to combine for the good of all rather than to fight, one against another, for selfish gain. It is the only world where all are borrowing and lending, giving and helping.'

'Brother, this dream of yours is like a socialist tract.'

'It may be. Yet you see how strongly it takes hold of me, that while I see the absurdity of the whole thing, it is not unpleasant to recall the recollection of it. Well—I do not know what set me talking about this dream.'

The smiles left his face: he became grave again: he ceased to talk: for the rest of the evening he was once more the old solicitor, weighed down with the affairs of other people.

'Checkley'—it was on the doorstep, and Sir Samuel waited while his wife said a few fond things to her sister—what the devil came over my brother to-night?

'I don't know indeed, Sir Samuel. I never heard him talk like that before. Doin' good to 'em? Servin' a writ upon 'em is more our line. I think he must be upset somewhere in his inside, and it's gone to his head.'

'Practical benevolence? Living for other people? Have you heard him complain of anything?'

'No, Sir Samuel. He never complains. Eats hearty, walks upright and strong, works like he always has worked.—Doin' good! And the blessedness of being pore! Seems most wonderful. Blessedness of being pore! Well, Sir Samuel, I've enjoyed that blessedness myself, and I know what it's like. Any ordinary preachin' chap might talk that nonsense; but for your eminent brother, Sir Samuel, such a lawyer as him—to be talking such stuff—if I may humbly so speak of my learned master's words—it is—Sir Samuel—it really is!'

'He said it was a dream, remember.—But I agree with you, Checkley. It is amazing.'

'Humph! The blessedness of being pore! And over such a glass of Port, too! I thought I should ha' rolled off my chair—I did, indeed.—Here's your good lady, Sir Samuel.'

'Elsie,' said Mrs Arundel in the carriage, 'I think it was high time that Mr Dering should take a partner. He to dream of practical benevolence? He to be diffusing happiness with open hands? Oh! most lamentable—I call it. However, the deeds are signed, and we are all right. In case of anything happening, it is a comfort to think that George's position would be only improved.'

MAGIC FINGERS.

BY ONE WHO IS BLIND.

It is said there are 'none so blind as those who won't see,' and if such obtuse folks are contrasted with those who can't see, the truth of the dictum becomes especially apparent. If we have the opportunity of observing them, we must occasionally be struck by the fact that the intelligent blind often know quite as much as, if not more of what is going on around them than many of those who are in full possession of all their senses. Their quickness of apprehension, their keenness of hearing, the sensitiveness of their touch, and the rapidity of their mental if not their bodily activity, are quite startling.

Albeit the eye is the most direct channel of knowledge to the brain, it is curious to observe not only how Nature compensates for the loss of

that organ, but how alert the other senses become. This seems to be generally assumed and admitted, yet only very recently has the world acted towards the blind in accordance with this assumption. Forty or fifty years ago they were regarded in Great Britain as an entirely helpless, unhappy class of beings, whom it was vain to try to educate up to the ordinary standard; and who could not be taught any methods of adequately earning their own living. It appeared to be thought that the loss of eyesight implied the loss of capacity to learn. Apart from the difficulties incident to the affliction, they were treated as incapable of understanding ordinary facts; all their faculties were supposed to be equally deadened, or at any rate they were treated as if such was the case. Infinite pity was bestowed upon them of course, and the more so from the assumed hopelessness of their condition.

Amongst the indigent blind especially the state of things was lamentable to a degree quite incredible, and it should be more widely known than it is that the first steps in the way of reformation were taken by the late Lord Shaftesbury. He showed the direction in which the very poor and ignorant required help; and the good work which he began has been ably carried on and developed, until even in their case it has been found possible to endow their fingers with a certain amount of magic. The commencement of the movement started by this eminently noble man and his band of equally philanthropic workers is worth briefly recording. His own words describe what it was that stirred him to the effort. At one of the annual meetings of the 'Indigent Blind Visiting Society,' which has its offices at 27 Red Lion Square, W.C., he said: 'When we first began our movement, the poor blind were altogether uncared for. They were known to exist; but there were very few people who knew where they were to be found. They were hiding away in cellars and all sorts of places. At that time, a gentleman called on me and proposed that an institution should be founded for the purpose of visiting these poor people; and they were discovered in dark, damp slums, and were looked upon more as reptiles than human beings. It was supposed that because they did not see the light, they never were in need of warmth or fresh air; they were never visited or comforted; they never went out of doors because there was no one to take them; and a more wretched condition than they were in could not be conceived.'

In a recently published account of an interview with the then secretary of this institution, the late Mr W. C. Lester (himself blind), he gives many interesting details of its work. 'Its object is fourfold,' he says—namely, to provide the blind with readers at their own homes; with the means to obtain guides to conduct them hither and thither; with schools where they are taught the rudiments of education—reading, writing, arithmetic, and such small handicrafts as they seem capable of executing, such as knitting, netting, &c.; and finally, with temporal relief at the discretion of the Committee.

The result of all these efforts in their behalf has been to transform the condition of this lowest class of sufferers into one of comparative comfort, usefulness, and cheerful well-being.

On a higher social and intellectual level, however, it is that a much vaster change has happily taken place, and is at last advancing with rapid strides, thanks, no doubt, to the wider enlightenment of our times on most subjects, but mainly owing to the example set us on the Continent, and particularly in the United States. France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and America long ago discovered what, as we have said, has been but slowly admitted here, and never acted on—namely, that when knowledge at one entrance is quite shut out, the remaining powers of acquiring it are stimulated to an unusual degree; and that, consequently, these need only be properly encouraged and trained to enable the sufferer to be placed comparatively on the same footing as the rest of mankind. We know, of course, that individual efforts in this direction, like that above quoted, have not been wanting, and that from time immemorial asylums have existed where the afflicted are taken good care of. But within the last twenty years only has any real attempt been made upon a broad comprehensive, wise, or scientific system to train and educate the blind physically and mentally. Following the example, however, set by the European nations and by our brethren across the Atlantic, the 'Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind' at Norwood, hard by the Crystal Palace, has commenced the labour in earnest in England, with results no less satisfactory than extraordinary. A visit to this interesting and admirable institution will show what a sound system of cultivation will do to make up for the loss of sight. It will prove beyond dispute that the pupils may be trained to fight the battle of life with a reasonable chance of passing through it victoriously, and not much in rear of their more fortunate fellow-creatures.

A feeling of the utmost astonishment in the first place will certainly be aroused by any one who chances to arrive at the College during play-time. It is scarcely possible to believe that those young people scampering about, shouting and rejoicing in all the exuberance of youthful spirits, are bereft of sight. Their activity and freedom of demeanour are amazing; and when, by closer acquaintance with the establishment, we learn how this is acquired, our surprise is only partially modified. The grounds attached to the College embrace some six acres, and afford ample opportunities for exercise. Free gymnastics, military drill, running, &c., and skating, develop the physical strength of the pupils.

A large covered gymnasium for boys, another for girls, and a swimming bath, have been added from time to time; so that for physical training there is probably no public school of its size for the 'seeing' that is better equipped, or where the average strength and agility of the pupils are greater. This physical training was from the first considered of paramount importance, and every year has confirmed such a view. Blind children are often enfeebled from the same cause which produced their blindness; added to which, from their difficulty in moving about freely, they are not inclined to take the active exercise which is so characteristic of the seeing at the same time of life; they therefore become timid, weak, and awkward; and these tendencies must be artificially counteracted.

Striking instances of how comparatively little the infirmity need interfere with the activity and the capacities of manhood might be cited; but as one is as good as a score, we have only to turn to the case of the late Henry Fawcett, Postmaster-general, as the freshest in our mind. True, he was not blind from childhood, which of course makes a great difference; but the determination he displayed not to allow his misfortune to interrupt his career, and the success which attended it, sufficiently proves what is possible. His love of the open air, manly exercise, and sport, had made him familiar with Nature; and he used to boast that, with an intelligent companion by his side, he could enjoy as fully as ever the beauties of the outer world in his walks, drives, and rides, for he rode as boldly almost after he had lost his sight as he did before. He also continued to the last to exercise with the keenest enjoyment his favourite sport of fishing, whilst intellectually he pursued his studies and executed his multifarious business transactions with a degree of energy and completeness not to be exceeded by the most competent.

Say that his case is scarcely representative of the ordinary run of blind people, we can still find in it the spirit which should animate us as to possibilities. As a rule, blindness entails a certain amount of poverty; and where a child is born blind of indigent parents, its case indeed looks hopeless. But it is just in this direction that the public has required, and is now receiving enlightenment. That child in all probability if subjected to the Normal College system of education, &c., may be eventually placed, as has been said, in a position to take his stand in the world on a nearly equal footing with his seeing brother. He can be taught to read, write, and cipher with all that these lead up to, if not as readily at least nearly as completely as any other average boy or girl; and if he is never wholly able to compete with the seeing in bread-winning, he can preserve a large amount of independence; whilst, if he possess a common capacity for music, that gift can be developed to a degree which will ensure him a career in certain branches of the art whereby he can, in every sense of the expression, earn his own living.

If we are surprised at the spectacle of blind children at play, assuredly we shall not be less so when we come to observe them at work. Then, indeed, we might believe that their fingers are endowed with magic. It is not our intention here to describe in detail the modern forms, apparatus, machinery, and systems of teaching. They will, however, well repay investigation; and as a compendium on the subject in all its bearings we would, short of a visit to Norwood, point to *The Education of the Blind—what it has been, is, and ought to be*, by T. R. Armitage, M.D. In passing, it may be added that to Dr Armitage is mainly due the improvement in the educational system now universally adopted in England. A rising physician, of high attainments and infinite promise, he was overtaken by atrophy of the optic nerve when still a young man; and knowing that he would be thus obliged to abandon his career in medicine, and having some independent means, he at once manfully faced his difficulty. Thenceforth, he determined to devote himself to the cause of his fellow-sufferers. He immedi-

ately set about mastering the state of their affairs in England; and contrasting it with what he found it to be in other countries, he sought with the utmost diligence, perseverance, and untiring zeal to bring up our teaching and training to the same level of excellence. The success which has crowned his efforts is proverbial amongst the blind. He is emphatically their friend; and is regarded, and will continue to be regarded, as one of the truest pioneers and reformers in all appertaining to the welfare of the class for whom he labours.

Everybody knows that there are embossed books, &c., for reading; but few outside those concerned are aware what a vast change has taken place in the system of embossed literature. That bulky volume of one of the Gospels which we have seen on the knees of some blind mendicant at a quiet street corner, and from which he is pretending to read with his fingers, in a dull monotonous voice, and with the air of a lesson known by heart, can be replaced by a book a quarter the size—more complete and far more quickly to be deciphered by the sensitive fingertips. The 'Braille' dotted alphabet has taken the place of all others, at least for educational purposes, and is one of the most ingenious of arbitrary alphabetical inventions, readily to be learned by the young, and possessing the immense advantage of being as readily written and afterwards read by the blind writer. By its means, too, music can be taught through the touch as completely as through the eye; and in listening to a concert given by the scholars of the Normal College, we might find a difficulty in believing that such perfect execution and such admirable compositions as are sometimes heard could emanate from a class living entirely in the land of darkness. Magic is the only word for it; the fingers become eyes; and there seems to be an optic disc in each of their tips capable of conveying intelligence to the brain as quickly, and in all respects as efficiently, as the veritable 'window of the soul' itself.

Whether the independence gained by such training as that afforded by the Normal College is greater in those who are blind from childhood or in those who meet with the affliction in mid-career, is a question. Cases like that of Henry Fawcett—and there are not a few similar—would indicate that a brave man can face the inevitable without the training—or very little of it—by which those who have never seen the light are enabled to make their way through the world. It is said that the first thing a person has to do who becomes blind in maturity is 'to learn to be blind'; whilst those who are so from childhood have, so to speak, always been in training. There is no novelty for them in the situation, and they should therefore, one would think, be morally if not physically better off in all respects. The affliction in their case is shorn of half its terrors—indeed, it cannot be called an affliction—the absence of light to those who have never seen it means nothing. Hence it might be argued that they should be fuller of resource; the more capable, the more independent; the more up to contrivances and dodges—in a word, the better able to contend with and outwit their infirmity. On the other hand, Henry Fawcett's career would go to prove the contrary, or that it made little

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difference whether a man began life by learning to be blind or only took up the business midway. We must not forget, however, that his was an exceptional nature. His great intellectual powers carried him successfully through all he attempted; and it would have been strange if he had not speedily mastered the difficulties of the new trade so lamentably thrust upon him. Doubtless, he found a very short apprenticeship sufficient to make him an expert, although as a matter of fact he served his full time, and a great deal more, counting by the years of his blindness. The question, however, is a very large one, and we suspect it must greatly depend on the individual himself; for, with the blind as with the seeing, there are the dull and stupid as there are the bright and intelligent; and contrasting a blind specimen of the latter with a seeing specimen of the former, we shall justify the assertion with which we started—namely, that 'there are none so blind as those who won't see.' They have eyes for nothing; whereas the really blind are, so to speak, bristling with eyes. Every sense is alive with an intelligence often of more value than mere physical sight, and hence it may truly be said that theirs are Magic Fingers.

THUNDERBOLT'S MATE.

III.

THE Belton buggy had come twenty-five miles at express speed; the horses were steaming; and it was three miles farther to the township. Nevertheless, young Rooper was flicking his whip to push on, when Lees ran back, breathless, and got to the horses' heads. 'Hold on!'

'Can't, Mr Lees.'

'You can—you must. I'll send a man on horseback to the township in half the time it'll take you to drive. He'll be back with the police long under the hour. Meanwhile, you will have had something to eat with us, and I shall have run up a fresh pair for your buggy. These are dead-beat. It will save you time in the end.'

Rooper and Michie put their heads together, but only for an instant. The good sense of the squatter's proposal was as obvious as its good nature; besides, it was the Bilbil dinner hour, and the young men were hungry. As they alighted from the buggy, Lees ordered the Belton horses to be watered and turned loose, and Bushman and Bluebeard, his own favourite pair, to be run up from the horse-paddock. Then, Mr Lees having promptly despatched a messenger, they all adjourned to the dining-room, where they found Mrs Lees awaiting them. She was slightly pale, and scared by the sensational news, but eager to hear everything; and she was soon in possession not only of the facts of the present case, but of many other facts in connection with the notorious Thunderbolt, to say nothing of hearsay.

Thunderbolt, then, was rumoured to be a man of far greater refinement than most practitioners in his line—Burke, Morgan, or Ben Hall, for instance; he had also in some quarters a reputation for an alleged gallantry of bearing towards all women who came in his way professionally;

but in violence, in daring, and in insolence, he was not second to the worst of them. The Roopers had yarns about him from a station of theirs in Queensland, which was Thunderbolt's own colony and his commonest hunting-ground; but Michie, the Belton overseer, had actually exchanged shots with the desperado on a former occasion. You might have known Bob Michie a lifetime without knowing a word about that incident, or indeed about any other incident in which he had himself played a prominent part; but the old story was wrung from him to-night. He had been on the lower Queensland roads, in charge of sheep, and had happened to camp outside a township on the very night that the bank there was visited by Thunderbolt and his mate. Well, when the family at the bank were discovered sitting round the supper table like corpses—gagged every one of them and tied to their chairs—a hue and cry was started. It chanced that the discovery was made much sooner than the bushrangers had bargained for. The latter were surprised in camp, a few miles from the township; they had just time to mount their horses, which they had not unsaddled, and a hot chase followed. Michie outstripped competitors in pursuit, had a bullet through his hat, and in return shot off the little finger of either Thunderbolt or his mate; in the darkness it was impossible to tell which, only the finger was found.

'So I suppose the first thing you did to-day, when you'd got your man safe, was to make him show his hand, eh?' asked Lees, laughing; but neither Michie nor young Rooper had thought of it; and at this moment voices were heard outside. The messenger had returned with the buggy and with a policeman. The sergeant and another trooper were following on horseback, and would overtake the buggy. With hasty apologies and good-byes, the young men left the table and drove off. The meal would have gone on rather silently after that, for the men were all yearning to be at Belton and see the fun; but Penelope kept them busy answering her questions. She had drunk in every word that had fallen from the lips of the redoubtable Michie, and the item of the little finger in particular had entertained her greatly.

All this was on the Saturday evening. Sunday brought startling news. The buggy and the police had arrived at Belton only to find the bird flown—none knew how—none knew whither. Thunderbolt was at large again, and in Riverina.

It went against the grain with William Lees to return to the wool-shed that night; but his wife assured him that she had no fear so long as Penelope and she were not left entirely alone; and indeed the chances were that the bushranger, if not speedily recaptured, would press northward to the Queensland frontier. So Lees went, but left both the overseer and the storekeeper behind him at the homestead. It was arranged that these two should drive out to the shed the first thing each morning, returning at sundown; and the plan answered admirably. Never had the Bilbil flocks been better shorn; never had there been more perfect discipline at the Bilbil shed, never less grumbling. Moreover, the 'clip' throughout Riverina was likely to prove a better one than had been obtained for years.

Meanwhile, the broken leg went on mending in the most satisfactory fashion, and its owner seemed quite to have ingratiated himself with Mrs Lees and her little madcap daughter, Penelope. From the very first he had been patient, and grateful for the smallest thing done for him; but a certain moroseness, that had disfigured his manner in the earliest days, disfigured it no longer. Now he seemed glad enough of company; and Mrs Lees often sat with him. Once or twice he even asked to be read to; and Mrs Lees was not only good enough to read to him by the hour, but sensible enough to make the literature the lightest she could lay hands upon. Yet the man was far from desiring perpetual entertainment. Mrs Lees presently discovered that silent companionship had an attraction of its own for Brown. She found that she could sit beside him for hours, the silence of which he made no attempt to break so long as she showed no sign of going. She had only to gather up her work, however, for Brown to run up a barrier of questions to keep her where she was. It was as though silence lost its charm for him the moment it was enforced by solitude—as though a sympathetic presence was essential to the enjoyment of his reveries—queer traits, both of them, in a rough common bushman. But Brown was scarcely a common bushman, there was so much that was uncommon in him. Mrs Lees furtively watching the dark, brooding face, would have given worlds to share just one of poor Brown's waking dreams. Daily she burned for one little glimpse of the scenes that were passing before those wide-open, sunken eyes, staring at nothing in particular, but staring at it so long. Being a woman, and one without much to occupy her in the long, hot, sleepy days, this curiosity was very natural; but it was very well for her peace of mind that Mrs Lees had no way of gratifying her curiosity.

Once a day, sometimes twice, the dark inscrutable face underwent sudden transfiguration, and became ten years younger in expression; the eyes shone with delight and interest and admiration. It was when little Penelope appeared on the scene.

The homestead at Bilbil consisted of so many little trifling buildings, that to enumerate them would be insufferable; but there was one big building, with a little pocket edition of itself tacked on to one end of it, that was the centre of the system. The component parts of the big building were two long, bare, parallel verandas, with the station store, the dining-room, and some spare bedrooms enclosed between them. The pocket edition was called the Cottage, and as it only contained Mrs Lees's quarters, it was also something of an *édition de luxe*. Here the veranda was anything but bare; it was closed in by a screen of trellis-work and creepers, which turned it into a long room with open ends. In this cool retreat Mrs Lees's work-table and Mrs Lees's long wicker-work chair were generally pitched; in fact, Mrs Lees spent most of her time between this veranda and the sitting-room which opened upon it.

From the latter half of August, the long wicker-work chair—which was really more of a sofa—began to be occupied all day and every day by one person—the man Brown; and by

the first of September Brown was able to get backwards and forwards, between this and his room in the barracks, on a pair of makeshift crutches. It was here, then, that he saw so much of Mrs Lees—and spoke to her so little; and it was here that his face changed so when little Miss Pen flitted through the veranda and popped into the sitting-room, to take leave of her mother before her day's work out at the shed began, and when she came in—with her sprightly steps, and with sand and dust clinging to her little blue riding-habit—to report herself at the day's close. It is true that Pen seldom forgot to fling a word to poor Brown, lying quietly there in the long chair; but she was too completely self-engrossed, it is to be feared, to stop and talk to him for many seconds together; and he saw the last of her always too soon, with wistful eyes.

'Morning, Brown—how's the poor leg?' she would jerk out; or: 'Better, Brown? That's all right; lucky thing I found you though, eh?'

Brown was always ready with a cheerful answer; but she seldom waited to hear it; and as for firing questions back at her, with a view to detaining the sunbeam, that was a foregone failure.

One evening, however, she came in with a splendid emu's egg, which she had found for herself on the run; and this she could not resist stopping to show to Brown. He took it in his left hand—his right lay thrust in his breast-pocket—and admired it deliberately, so deliberately, that Pen could hardly restrain herself from snatching it away from him, in her eagerness to dart off and show it to some one else. But Brown had the egg in his hand, and his opportunity too. 'Have you ever seen one of these carved, missie?' he asked her shyly.

'Only once—over at Belton,' replied Pen. 'We have two carved ones here.'

'Would you like to have a carved one? Would you like to have this egg carved?'

Giddy little Pen was arrested at last: she forgot her anxiety to show the egg to the others; and her eyes glistened. 'Would I *not*!' she cried, with great emphasis. 'You don't mean to say you can carve emu eggs?'

'Well, I used to be able to do it; I used to turn an honest penny at the game—once.' Brown sighed. 'I suppose I haven't forgot how.'

Pen began clapping her hands—but quickly stopped. 'I say,' she said gravely, 'I haven't got any money, you know! I've only got what's in my money-box—and I don't think I may touch that,' she added doubtfully.

Brown stared at her out of his deep-set eyes; there was something reproachful in his look. 'It isn't likely I'm going to charge you anything, Miss Pen—now, is it? I'll carve this egg for love—as the saying is; and I'll carve it better than ever I carved an emu egg in my life before. Consider what you done for me, little miss!'

Pen considered. It yielded nothing. She was not accustomed to consider. 'What have I done?' she asked at last with eyes wide open.

Brown gazed at her some moments without replying; then he said: 'You saved my life, little miss—that's what you did!'

His tone struck the child as odd, somehow. 'Aren't you glad?' she asked, laughing. 'You

don't say it as though you were. And you ought to be *jolly* glad, you know.'

'I ought to be grateful—and grateful I am. But glad? Pretty well, Miss Pen—pretty well.'

Pen opened her eyes very wide indeed, and suddenly they filled with tears. She had never dreamt of any one being anything but glad not to die. The very idea of indifference in the matter was frightful to her, and frightening too. This poor man's pain, then, must be terrible; his unhappiness—very likely about something else—must be unbearable. Would it cheer him up at all if she, Pen, were to stop at home to-morrow and chatter to him all day, instead of going out as usual to her beloved shed? At all events, Pen resolved to try it; and as it was not quite the easiest thing in the world for such an extremely keen little stock-rider to do, she bound herself down then and there by a promise, and consigned the precious egg to Brown's safe keeping.

'To-morrow morning you shall carve it, Brown, do you see? And I'll sit here and see it done; and I shan't show it to any of the others till it is done—so just now you may keep it.'

Brown smiled upon her as she went. He was not smiling when she rushed and found him in the same place immediately after breakfast next morning. He was looking decidedly crestfallen. The emu egg was stuck in the wicker ring with which these long chairs are provided, and intended, if required, to hold a tumbler. Penelope snatched up the egg; but there was not a scratch upon its dark-green surface.

'Why,' cried Pen, visibly disappointed, 'you haven't even begun yet, you lazy man! Aren't you going to?'

'No, miss,' said Brown ruefully.

'Then why did you promise, I should like to know?' Pen had coloured up.

'Because I had forgotten something, Miss Pen.'

'Pray, what had you forgotten?' Pen demanded scornfully.

'Why, that an accident, which happened since I last touched an emu egg, has crippled me so that I can't carve any more.'

'Your right hand?'

'Yes.'

His right hand was out of sight, as usual, in the breast of his coat. Nor did he withdraw it; but, quick as thought, Penelope did so for him. The next moment she started back. The little finger was gone!

Brown saw her start, and he changed colour. A struggle was going on in the child's mind; he read it in her frightened, plucky little face; but he did not read the end of it; he expected her to run away and bring the place about his ears: instead of which, she looked him boldly in the face and exclaimed solemnly: 'You're Thunderbolt!'

Brown answered coolly: 'I'm not, miss. Whatever makes you think so? When have you heard of him?'

'The other night; Mr Michie was telling us—it was he that shot off your little finger for you! Stop a moment: of course you can't be Thunderbolt, because they'd taken him just then: so, then, you're his mate!'

Brown did not answer. His face was pale, his deep eyes were full of distress.

'Are you?' asked the child, in a wild whisper.

Their eyes were fastened together in a long mutual gaze. Even at that moment Pen realised, with a thrill of wonder, that she was neither trembling nor quailing under his glance, which indeed was gentle enough and reassuring; but she felt no surprise when he gravely bowed his head towards her, nor did her fears increase. She was certainly an odd child brought up in an odd way; but even so, she may not have realised quite what a bushranger was, for she stared this one out of countenance, and then said severely: 'Did you ever shoot any one?' (She may not have realised the full force of 'shooting any one,' either.)

'Never,' said Brown firmly.

'Never, on your word of honour?'

'I'm not supposed to have a word of honour,' said Brown, smiling faintly; 'but I only know I never did shoot a fellow-creature—as sure as I'm lying here! There was only one man I ever felt like shooting—Thunderbolt himself! When I was thrown, crossing the run here, he took my horse and left me to die.—Curse him; I could shoot him as I'd shoot an ox!—But forgive me, miss: it was you that saved me: it was you that saved me!'

For one moment Pen did feel frightened—the moment in which he had spoken of Thunderbolt. Then Brown's face had flared up with sudden passion; but now it was calm again; now it was calmer than before. And there was truth in the deep, dark, wistful eyes; and his eyes seemed to Pen more sad and more sunken than they had ever been before; and the whole appearance of the man was more pitiable to look upon—from grief and shame—not from fear and trembling. Child as she was—possibly, because she was a child—Pen read his look aright. It touched her to the heart. She took between her own brown fingers the maimed, coarse hand that she had dropped with such sudden terror. 'Look here,' she whispered distinctly, while a strangely wilful expression came over her determined little face. 'If I really did do what you say I did—if I really saved you that day—I'm not going to undo it by letting on. So I shan't tell a soul. I'll die first!'

THE DESERTS OF CALIFORNIA.

THE railroad of the Southern Pacific Company connecting San Francisco and New Orleans has in its passage through Southern California opened a most interesting and extensive region to the enjoyment of travellers, who, nevertheless, pass quickly across it, satisfied with what glimpses to the right and left they may catch on their way to the land beyond of perpetual roses and endless succession of fruits, never dreaming that they are ignoring the most novel and weird experiences of the trip.

The word 'desert' brings at once before us wide expanses of loose gray sand, varied only by white and glistening patches of the alkali so deadly to all serviceable growth; but the picture is true only in part. The Deserts of California are as varied in their surface and vegetation as

are those sections so noted for their wealth of production. Between San Francisco and Los Angeles lies the Mojave Desert, fast narrowing its limits by the encroachments of settlers, who utilise even the smallest streams from the mountains, that were once allowed to lose themselves in the sands, but are now conducted through pipes or trenches for domestic and irrigating purposes. Sometimes wells are dug or bored, the waters raised by the strong arms of a windmill, and dispensed as the all-powerful inspiration to use and beauty. Carried swiftly across the wide plains of Western California, the eye of the traveller yet has time to note the novelty and beauty of the scenery, varying with the season of passage: the numerous ranches, or farms, lying in every direction, separated by a mile or two of level grain-land, look like little villages, with their groups of buildings, their trees and shrubbery, and, crowning all, the giant windmills that wrest from earth its long-locked stores. Like gems of green they shine out from their golden setting of ripening grain, and at all seasons the winding roads and beaten paths are hospitable invitations that promise one a welcome to the hearts of tasteful homes.

Unreclaimed desert lands, with their wild growths of cactus, often intervene before reaching Los Angeles, or 'the city of the angels,' so long the theme of verse and story, but now fast losing its romantic Spanish characteristics in its metropolitan growth. Still eastward lies Pasadena, not a town in the usual sense, but a wide suburb of Los Angeles. In passing through it we see mile after mile dotted with tasteful villas, and green with their surrounding orange groves, all wrested from the so-called desert lands; then in quick succession we pass thriving villages and towns, the growth of the last ten years, until the largest, Colton, is left behind; here we ascend gradually for twenty-three miles, until a height of nearly three thousand feet above sea-level is reached at the San Geronio Pass, now so noted for its revivifying influence upon consumptive invalids. On its fertile breast nestle the little towns of Beaumont and Banning, sheltered by the Sierra Madre range on the north, the San Jacinto Mountains on the south, and opening eastward to the warm dry breath of the desert, refusing entrance to the coast-fogs by the forbidding shoulders of the intervening mountains.

Some six miles from Banning begins the great eastern desert of California, known as the Colorado. Our downward course here stops only at one hundred and fifty feet below sea-level, where the microscope shows the sand to be made up of tiny sea-shells, delicately perfect though so minute. These and the larger shells, abounding so plentifully, prove to the scientist that here was once the bottom of the sea, though his wisdom has not yet solved the riddle of the change to its present condition. However, shift-

ing sand is but one feature of this desert. In climbing the farther slope, Mammoth Tank Station is reached, its name suggested by the great natural tanks existing in the mountains near by, that, being filled during the heavy rains, are never empty the year round. This neighbourhood is one of the most picturesque and interesting of the eastern desert. Long stretches of the surface are often so hardened by the action of rain, wind, and sun, that a carriage and horses passing over them leave scarcely a trace behind; and where the disintegration of the rocks is going on among the mountain ranges that traverse these plains, the rush of the waters after heavy rains carries far out the many-angled fragments, dovetailing them together into a mosaic that runs through the gamut of rock-colours from white to black, forming a surface so firm and even that one might ride for miles without jolt or jar, were it not for the numerous dry water-beds that intersect it, dug out by the force of the torrents succeeding to the cloud-bursts that occur in their season on the mountain tops.

These wayward streams do not always follow the same channel; but where they do, there the moisture lingers, and often long lines of trees outline their borders; the branches interlacing overhead, form a grateful shade for a walk or a drive along the hardened water-bed.

Where the sand is loose and driven by the wind, a succession of hills has been formed to the south, whose soft tints change from misty white to a glowing salmon pink according as they are affected by the enchantment of distance or other atmospheric influences. Driving gaily along your boulevard of hardened sand, at its end you may go with a rush to the very top of one of these smooth-breasted mounds and behold a new wonder. Fenced in by many a neighbouring drift, a little sheltered nook is found where the lingering moisture inspires the growth of grass and flowers; and the desert quail come here for food and drink; and with your shot-gun in hand, if you are quick and sure with aim and trigger, a brace or two of these toothsome morsels may prove to you at the dinner hour that you are still a being of common earth and air, and not a sojourner in a land of myths and dreams. Here little groves of Mesquite trees nestle against the breast of the motherly mounds, and even from their tops a gnarled and twisted and uncertain growth often waves its wild arms in the changing winds. One symmetrical base I remember as an object of amused surprise, upon whose top writhed the serpents of the 'Laocoön' around the three central figures, in such close imitation of the originals in marble, that, were it not for the single branch of living green that grew from the head of the tallest of the group, there might have been a suspicion of some complicity between the hands of man and of Nature.

Water, then, is the wonder-worker, and it alone is needed to redeem much of this seemingly barren waste; hence the late agitation as to the

feasibility of supplying this want through deflecting the waters of neighbouring rivers into vast reservoirs for distribution. Late American newspapers state that a plan is on foot among capitalists in Chicago for irrigating three hundred thousand acres of these lands. Companies of capitalists have already done much in this direction, but on a smaller scale, and the redemption of all the desert lands is a scheme of such gigantic proportions that it is thought the Government only should take charge of its development.

The deserts are not so destitute of water as is often believed. Besides the many mountain streams that lose themselves in the sand, springs with varied characteristics abound; and occasionally wells furnish exhaustless supplies. One of the last-named is at Indio, the first station of any importance east of Banning. At Volcano, a few miles distant, are curious mud springs, boiling, evidently, over the influence of subterranean fires.

About twenty-six miles east of Banning, and a little off from the track of the Southern Pacific Railroad, between two spurs of the San Jacinto range of mountains, is a place called Palm Springs. It can be reached from the station of Seven Palms by a drive of about six miles across the sands. Here a few capitalists have interested themselves in testing the productiveness of the desert soil by supplying it with water. Orange, lemon, lime, and fig trees have been set out; some of the last-named began to bear the second year; for the others, a longer time is needed to test their success; but grape-vines come rapidly and abundantly into bearing, and vegetables can be raised the winter through. This place takes its name from a curious warm spring, the bottom of which has never been reached, as it indignantly resents all explorations in that direction by throwing up the lead, or the venturesome man, to the top, like a cork, and scratching him well with the sheets of fine sand it flings out with its bubbling waters. Persons, however, who are rheumatic, and who persevere in such baths, soon leave most of their pains behind.

The California rains occur between November and May, except on these sandy plains where the storms and 'washouts' are usual during the heated term. This makes it possible for the health-seeker to avoid all injurious dampness by passing the winter months in the gentle and balmy air of the desert, thus enjoying a perpetual summer without any great extremes of heat.

Dr Welwood Murray, a Scotchman, formerly of Edinburgh, whose health has been restored by a few years' enjoyment of this climate, has built a most picturesque and comfortable home at Palm Springs, where, during the winter months, he often receives those who, in his belief, may be benefited by a sojourn in this interesting region. Gradually, other homes are clustering around this central one; improvements of various kinds are being inaugurated, and the time cannot be far distant when this lovely spot will be a favourite resort and a sample of what may be repeated many times in like situations. It has long been a place of sojourn for the native Indian, and a few trained grape-vines of unknown age and astonishing circumference attest the fact; and it is no wonder that he should wish to linger here and feast his eyes before resuming his restless

tramp, when even as early as February and March the earth is aglow with flowers. You may go for miles through blossoms of the wild verbenas, mostly purple and white, though occasionally a pink one blushes shyly between, while here and there tall stalks bearing flaunting colours wave like flags above the sea of bloom. In quiet nooks or in deep broad canyons of the mountains are the stately palms; and the climbing vines swing to the music of the waterfalls, hiding their charms for the lovers of Nature, who, patiently seeking, shall find and enjoy them.

The varied shapes and blossoms of the cactus are better known than other characteristics of these sections, as their fantastic forms and brilliant colours are easily seen *en route*, but a closer study of their peculiarities is abundantly rewarded. The tongue-shaped cactus, of which specimens are found in our conservatories, can be grown into an impenetrable hedge of twenty feet in height, its fruit being quite palatable if you can succeed in removing the skin, which is so filled with microscopic spines that it can be a torture to the unwary for days after eating. The cone-shaped cactus, which seldom grows beyond four or five feet in height, is crowned once a year with circles of blossoms, some shading from white through the yellows into green, others gorgeous in reds. One species takes the shape of branching coral, protects itself by innumerable yellow spines an inch in length, and it flowers in delicate yellows. The cane-shaped variety often shoots to a height of from ten to fourteen feet, and bursts, rocket-like, into brilliant bloom, from the top. Where moisture has failed to keep alive some of these children of the desert, and the storms have washed away the green pulp and the thorns, you find a delicate skeleton tube of lacework, regular and beautiful in its design, and all unarmed against your appropriation of its charms.

Mining in the mountains of the desert is carried on to some extent, but there, too, the lack of water is a limitation. There is no lack of gold and silver, but the expense of freeing them from their neighbouring rock discourages enterprise; but many of the Indians, Spaniards, and Mexicans, by working a few months in the mountains, unearth enough for their needs during the remainder of the year. It is true that they are primitive in their habits and desires, yet they are often as reckless in their expenditures as their more enlightened neighbours.

Wild rumours of boundless wealth hidden away in these mountain fastnesses often reach the ear of the traveller. The tale of the 'Lost Mine' in its various phases is as enchanting to his adult ear as were the wonders of the *Arabian Nights* to his youthful imagination; and many fruitless searches and schemes have been tried to win the secret from the rock or from the knowing ones among the tribes of Indians, who, it is said, are vowed to secrecy, the knowledge descending from father to son, and never to be revealed to a white man—a terrible death being the penalty of the broken oath. Whatever truth there may be behind these rumours, certain it is that there is a fascination in the wild life of the gold-seeker to many men who have expatriated themselves for the best years of their lives in their too often fruitless search; and the charms of the desert,

known best to the homeless tramp, who often winters in her warm bosom, have yet a growing hold upon those who are wearied with the sameness of all known things.

BEPPO.

BEPPO was the name of the new pony; and whatever in the world could be the matter with him neither master nor man could make out. The master was the new rector of Mackstey, Mr Martin, inexperienced in country life; and Beppo was his first adventure in horse-flesh. The man was Roger. Roger was a character; once seen, never forgotten. Mr Martin's new living was so far away from a railway station that a pony-carriage seemed a necessity; and there was a large garden, which he certainly could not work without assistance. He therefore retained the services of the late rector's factotum, and a good servant Roger made. He was masterful, it was true, and had his own way in everything. He ruled the stable and garden with the rule of an autocrat. He mercilessly snubbed his master when he displayed any innocent want of understanding of the details of Roger's departments. But he was a good servant; he had the interests of his master thoroughly at heart; and he had further a great notion of the dignity of his position in the village. He was indeed held in high esteem as the best authority on stock in the place; he was capable, moreover, of cutting hair, or shaving a sick man, or clipping a horse, and could, in short, turn his hand to almost anything that was wanted.

Roger was in dismay on hearing that the new rector was going to buy a pony. 'What does the master know about horse-flesh? Sure as I'm here, he'll be done.' But he was forced to admire Beppo when he arrived, and to approve of the purchase when he had seen him in harness. He was fourteen and a half hands high, six years old, a light chestnut. Mr Martin had been to Suffolk to look at him, and had been driven round the neighbourhood by his owner—who was a medical man retiring from the active work of his profession—to try the pony's paces. So pleased had he been, that the bargain was concluded, and in a few days Beppo arrived safely at Mackstey.

To drive he was excellent. He made a good pace, stepped out well, and seemed to be frightened at nothing. Wheelbarrows and tricycles had no terrors for him, nor even trains at the level crossings. But when he got into his stable, all seemed changed. He flagged, drooped his head and ears, looked uneasily round whenever the door opened, and was generally out of sorts. At first this was set down to the change of groom; but he had no dislike for Roger, and indeed had taken to him readily. Could it be change of air? If so, he would be equally uneasy when being driven. After a week or ten days a farrier was called in; but he professed himself unable to do anything, until some definite ailment declared itself. And so master and man were both getting dispirited.

'You'd better let me go, sir,' said Roger.

'Why, Roger, wouldn't you have bought him?'

'Well, perhaps—with reluctance the man

admitted—'I suppose I should. But I should have asked more about him, and found out if anything wasn't quite right. You can't buy a horse like you buy a leg o' mutton.'

'Well, but he's a good beast, Roger, and I'm sure you would have bought him if you had gone.'

'Maybe so, maybe so; but I never bought a pig in a poke yet.'

The gentleman from whom the purchase had been made was communicated with, and was much annoyed that anything should seem to be wrong. Nothing of the sort had ever been noticed before, and the animal was sound in every way. Mr Martin had in fact paid a guinea for a certificate to that effect. And so what to do they did not know.

Now it happened, about a fortnight after the purchase, that Mr Martin had to drive to the station, some six miles off, to fetch his sister's son, Alfred, to spend a portion of his holidays at Mackstey. He was a very bright boy of twelve, and a great favourite with Mrs Martin, and with his little cousin Lucy, who was some three years younger than Alfred, and who regarded him as a sort of perfection of boyhood. He was full of tricks and dodges and fun, without being mischievous; and as good-humoured and affectionate as a boy could be. At home he had numbers of pets, having a craze for live creatures; but he was never charged with ill-treating them, or neglecting them, or getting tired of them.

'How do, uncle?—Oh! what a jolly cob!' were the words with which he announced himself, bag in hand, as he emerged from the station gateway.

'How are you, Alfred?—All well at home?—That's right.—Yes, the pony looks nicely, doesn't he? You shall see him trot directly. But there's something wrong with him, I don't know what. He isn't all right in the stable.'

'What's amiss?' asked the boy.

'I wish I could tell you. Can't find out. He doesn't seem happy. Do you know anything about horse-flesh? I should think a couple of half-crowns well laid out, if you can give us a hint.'

Alfred laughed at the idea; but his experience was not among horses. And so they chatted on till they reached the rectory.

Here Lucy took possession of the boy at once, and showed off the premises to him. His interest was greatly aroused when he realised the immense capacity of the stable yard for a private menagerie. A broken-down summer-house in a neglected corner of the garden at once suggested rabbits.

'Will aunt let you keep rabbits, Lucy? I could soon turn this into a rabbit hutch.'

And so, chatting and laughing, skipping and trotting, the little girl led her cousin round to introduce him to Roger. The indisposition of the pony was heavy on Roger's soul; and he disliked visitors to the stable in consequence. There was a reproach to him, Roger, in asking a stranger what he could suggest.

Alfred went up directly to the pony's head, and patted it and spoke to it. 'Good old Beppo! What's amiss, Beppo? Don't you like Mackstey?'

The pony had looked round when the stable door opened, but drooped his head again listlessly when the children came in.

'Are you a horse-doctor, sir?' asked Roger.

'No, I'm not,' answered the boy; 'but I'm very fond of live beasts, and they generally like me.—You'll soon like me, won't you, Beppo?' And the creature certainly did seem to respond to the boy's caresses. 'And I've got an idea,' proceeded the boy; 'and I'll tell uncle.'

'What's your idea, sir? Better tell me. The master don't know much about horse-flesh.'

'Never mind. I'll tell him first.'

And so the children moved away. But no sooner were they out of Roger's hearing than Lucy began to coax. 'Tell me, Alfred dear, do tell me.'

'Promise not to tell, Lucy. I believe Beppo misses something—something on the ground. He keeps looking down. There has been a tame bird, or a puppy, or something, where he came from, that he was fond of. And he can't make it out. Haven't you got a dog?'

'Father talks of getting one,' answered the girl; 'but he hasn't heard of one yet.'

'Well, let's find uncle, and see what he thinks of my idea.'

Mr Martin was soon found, reading in the greenhouse. He was much tickled with the boy's fancy, and thought it characteristic and original; but was laughingly obliged to admit that he did not see much in it. However, on being pressed by Alfred, he undertook to write to Beppo's late owner and ask the question. Until a reply came, Roger was unceasing in his banter.

'Won't you tell me your idea, Master Alfred?' he asked. 'Come to nothing, eh? Not come to nothing? Going to cure him yet? We want a new farrier hereabouts. You might set up and make your fortune.'

Alfred did not mind this sort of joking at all, and generally retorted with effect.

And in a few days a letter came with a hamper from Beppo's late master. The letter said that the suggestion was a most happy one. There was a little kitten that used to frisk about Beppo's stable. The pony and the kitten were much attached to one another. Pussy would jump on the pony's back, play between his ears, drop into the manger, stand up and pat his nose; while Beppo would always look for her on his return from a drive. She had been much dispirited since her big play-fellow had gone, and as they were looking out for a home for her, they thought the best thing to do was to send her off at once to Mackstey, on the chance that Mr Martin might be able to keep her.

'Where's Alfred?' shouted Mr Martin. 'He shall open the hamper. He shall work out his idea all by himself.'

The boy took out the kitten carefully and gently and began to pet it and talk to it. Then he took it to the kitchen and buttered its paws, which he understood was the correct thing to do with a new cat. And then a procession advanced to the stable; Alfred bearing the kitten—who did not in the least understand what was going on—led the van; Lucy came next, in a state of great excitement; and last came Mr Martin, much amused, and very curious as to the result.

The result was as completely successful as their most sanguine expectations could have imagined. As soon as the stable door opened, the kitten jumped down with a loud 'Miew!' and bounded with tail erect to Beppo. He for his part at once recognised his friend, gave a glad whinny, and put his head down to the ground and fondled the little thing gently. Then she jumped up to the manger, on to the pony's head, and ran up and down the whole length of his back. It was the prettiest thing to see, both creatures almost beside themselves with delight. The pony indulged in a gentle murmur of content; the kitten purred loudly.

The cure was complete. Roger gave in. Lucy admired Alfred more than ever.

'Let's see if I can find those two half-crowns I promised you,' said Mr Martin, as they left the stable; 'I never paid money better earned in my life.'

THE ROYAL ASSENT.

'THE sittings of both Houses were temporarily suspended in order to allow time for a Queen's messenger to proceed to Osborne to obtain the Royal Assent to the Appropriation Bill. Her Majesty's assent was telegraphed to Westminster, and at the re-assembling of the Houses the Queen's Speech was read, and Parliament prorogued with the usual formalities.' Such was the announcement that appeared in the daily papers at the close of the last session of Parliament; and to those unacquainted with parliamentary procedure, a few words in reference to the practice that prevails regarding the Royal Assent may be of interest.

In the first place, every Bill, whether it be a public or private one, that has passed through all its stages in both Houses must, before it can become law, receive Her Majesty's assent. Previous to the reign of Henry VIII. this assent had to be given in person; but by an Act passed in that monarch's reign, enabling the assent to be given by Commission, signed by the royal hand, this necessity was dispensed with. When the royal assent is given in person, the Clerk of the Parliaments waits upon Her Majesty in the robing-room before she enters the House of Lords, reads a list of the Bills, and receives her commands upon them. When Her Majesty is seated upon the throne, the Clerk of the Crown reads the title of each Bill; the Clerk of the Parliaments, if it be a public Bill, then signifies the royal assent in Norman-French as follows: 'La Reyne le veult' (The Queen wills it so to be). If the Bill be a private one, the form of assent is, 'Soit fait comme il est désiré' (Be it as it is desired). When, however, a Bill of Supply is passed, the assent is expressed thus: 'La Reyne remercie ses bons sujets, accepte leur benevolence, et ainsi le veult' (The Queen thanks her loyal subjects, accepts their benevolence, and wills it so to be). After each declaration by the Clerk, a gentle inclination is given by Her Majesty, indicating her assent. If, on the other hand, the royal assent is refused to any Bill, the Clerk declares, 'La Reyne s'avisera' (The Queen will advise—or think—upon it).

When the assent is signified by Commission,

the Lords Commissioners read the Commission, and precisely the same formalities are observed as in the Queen's presence.

Before proceeding further, it may be well to note that at the time of the Commonwealth, Cromwell's assent to Bills was given in English; but at the Restoration, the old form of words, in vogue since the reign of Henry VII., was resorted to; and only one attempt has since been made to abolish it, when, in 1706, the House of Lords originated and passed a Bill to abolish the use of the French tongue in all parliamentary proceedings; the Bill was, however, dropped in the House of Commons; hence it is that the ancient custom of giving expression to the royal assent in Norman-French still prevails.

There have been occasions, though not many, on which the royal assent has been refused to Bills. Thus, it is recorded in the Journals of the House of Lords that this prerogative was exercised by Queen Elizabeth at the close of a session in 1597 to the extent of withholding her assent to no fewer than forty-eight Bills. Again, in 1692, we learn that William III. refused his assent to a Bill for the establishment of triennial parliaments. He was, however, induced some two years later to allow the Bill to become law. The last occasion on which the royal assent was withheld was in 1707, when Queen Anne refused assent to a Bill entitled, 'An Act for settling the Militia of that part of the Kingdom called Scotland.' Just one hundred years later, when Lord Howick (afterwards Earl Grey) introduced a Bill to allow Catholics to serve in the army and navy, it is said that George III. strongly intimated that he would rather abdicate than give his assent to such a Bill; imagining that he was forbidden by his coronation oath to admit Catholics to any offices in the State. When at length, in 1829, the Act was passed in both Houses, George IV. at first refused his assent to it, but yielded on learning from Lord Eldon that the withholding of the assent would involve the resignation of his ministers. Sir Archibald Alison, the historian, deals with the matter in touching detail, showing the agony of mind of the king during the progress of the measure through Parliament, and concludes his account by saying: 'Such was the despair of the king that the unhappy monarch threw his arms around Lord Eldon's neck and wept, entreating him not to desert him, for he had no other to advise with.'

Circumstances have arisen when the strict formula observed in reference to obtaining the royal assent has had to be abandoned, as at the passing of the Regency Bill in 1811, when the assent to the measure was obtained under peculiar circumstances. The king being incapable of exercising any authority, the Great Seal was nevertheless affixed to a Commission for giving the royal assent. Again, in 1830, when it became painful to George IV. to sign with his own hand, recourse was had to a special statute, passed for the purpose, by which he was enabled to appoint one or more persons with full power and authority to each affix, in the king's presence and by his command, the royal signature by means of a stamp prepared for the purpose.

A curious instance is chronicled of the royal assent having been given to a Bill by mistake. Such an occurrence is recorded as having taken

place in 1844, when one of two railway Bills, which had not passed through all its stages in the House of Lords, received, in error, the assent intended for the Bill in which all the formalities had been complied with. This singular oversight necessitated the passing of a special Act in order to rectify matters.

Finally, it may not be generally known that in 1876, when the Queen was about to visit the Continent, some doubts were expressed whether she could legally give her assent to Bills by Commission during her absence. No case could be found in which the assent had been so given; but it was discovered that in the reign of William and Mary this contingency had been provided for to the effect that 'nothing should be taken to exclude or debar His Majesty from the exercise of any act or royal power, but that every such act should be as good and effectual as if His Majesty was within the realm.' Her Majesty was advised, therefore, that she would be able to give her assent to Bills while absent from the realm. Accordingly, several Bills received the Queen's assent under these unique circumstances.

CONFIDENCES.

MAIDEN.

Oh, you merry, idle fellow, high upon a beech-bough
swaying,
Have you really no employment all the long bright
forenoon through
But to watch the golden sunbeams 'mid the green
leaves flitting, playing,
And the glist'ning pilewort gleaming in the meadows
under you?

BLACKBIRD.

Pretty maiden, pretty maiden, in the branches green
and shady
There's a nest with five eggs resting on a smooth and
cosy bed,
And since the dawn of morning I am singing to a
lady
Who above her cosy dwelling lifts, to hear me, her
brown head.

But now tell me, pretty maiden, do you linger here
each morning
Just to see the daisies flutter as the south wind rushes
by,
Or to view the Lenten Lilies all the breezy slopes
adorning,
Or the tassels swinging gaily on the scented larch-
trees nigh?

MAIDEN.

Whisper, blackbird, for a moment: much, indeed, I
love the meadows,
Gorsy fells, and fragrant larch-woods, where the south
winds murmur low
To the wind-flowers flushed and trembling, and the
shifting lights and shadows—
But I'm watching for my lover, and you must let me
know.

M. ROCK.

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